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Chile Between Elections

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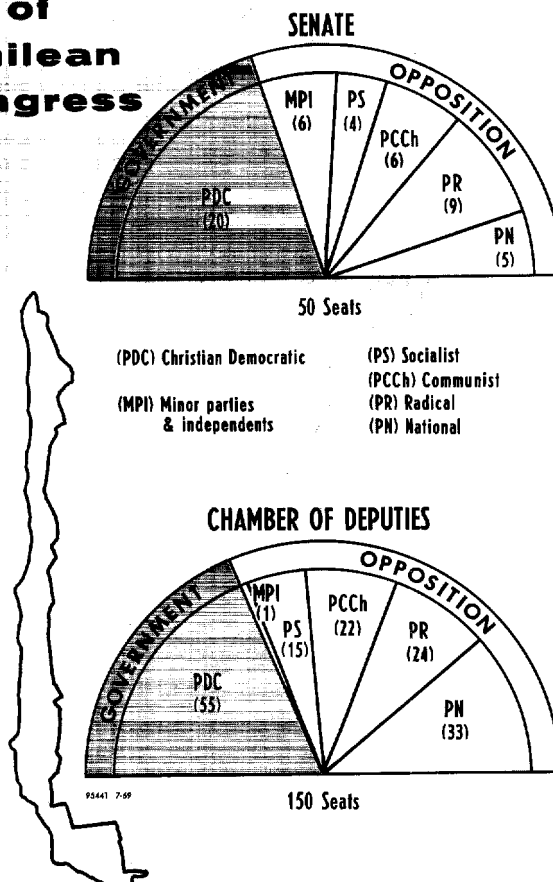
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CHILE BETWEEN ELECTIONS

Chile's next presidential election will be held in September 1970. Political parties already are assessing their positions, and the important ones probably will choose their candidates some time this summer. Their decisions will be influenced to some extent by the results of congressional elections held last March, which provided some evidence of political sentiment in the country and underscored the division of forces within some of the parties.

President Frei's Christian Democratic Party will be running on the administration's six-year record. Some members of the middle class, which provided the bulk of Frei's support in 1964, have seen their economic position erode under the impact of continuing inflation. Leftists within the Christian Democratic Party, and in other parties as well, believe that the pace of economic and social reform should be accelerated. They hope that the state will increase its role in the economy and advocate the "noncapitalist" way to economic development. The Christian Democratic candidate, whoever he may be, will have a difficult time reconciling the conflicting currents within his party.

Composition of Chilean Congress



(PDC) Christian Democratic
(MPI) Minor parties
& independents

(PS) Socialist
(PCCh) Communist
(PR) Radical
(PN) National

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THE CONGRESSIONAL ELECTIONS

President Frei's Christian Democratic Party (PDC) went into the elections last March hoping that a heavy victory would carry it into the presidential campaign next year with promising momentum. Most successful Christian Democratic candidates ran on a platform that more or less strongly supported the administration's program of economic and social reform, but many candidates emphasized their desire for more forceful action along these lines. The PDC received almost 30 percent of the vote, and remains the largest single party in Chile. Its showing was less than it had hoped for, however, and the party lost control of the Chamber of Deputies. On the other hand, its Senate representation nearly doubled because of some hold-over seats.

The most interesting aspect of the congressional elections was the strong showing made by the conservative National Party, which emerged from near-oblivion to become the second-largest party in the country. In large measure this result reflected a return to the right by voters who had chosen Frei in 1964 as the only alternative to Marxism and had since become disillusioned with his actions. In addition, the party was associated in the minds of voters with former president Jorge Alessandri, who is a popular, relatively conservative political figure.

The leftist parties—the Communists and Socialists—maintained their position with almost 30 percent of the vote between them. They will be able to conduct spoiling actions in Congress and will continue to frustrate Frei's programs.

The congressional elections saw the demise of several splinter parties, and only five major ones remain. This development is salutary for Chilean politics, which has been plagued by an overabundance of parties and politicians. Already, however, some splintering of these five is occur-



Jorge Alessandri

ring; several leftists have resigned from the PDC, and there is disaffection between the leadership of the formerly second-ranking Radical Party (PR) and its grass-roots strength.

All parties except the PR, which dropped from second to fourth position, claimed a victory of sorts in the elections. The realignment of strengths will have a strong bearing on the candidates nominated for the presidential election.

THE CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATIC PARTY

For several years the PDC has been split into three groups, with some blurring around the edges of each. To the right is the "officialist" group that strongly backs Frei's administration and as a rule can be counted on to support his programs in Congress and his proposals within the party. It is from this group that many cabinet ministers and other government officials have been drawn, thus depriving the party of some of its ablest leadership. To the left is a "rebel" group that often takes positions closer to those of the Communist Party than to those of President Frei. The rebels believe that Frei has compromised the

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revolutionary ideal, and they had hoped to form a unity of "popular forces" for the presidential election next year. Between the two is a "third" position that supports changes in Frei's program but wants to work within the party and the government to implement them.

Following the PDC's disappointing showing in the congressional elections, the various members of the party tried to outdo each other in fixing blame for the results. A Junta Nacional, or national directorate meeting, was held from 1 to 3 May to form a coherent program for the next 18 months. The most important question to be considered was whether to form an alliance with other leftist parties or to run a candidate under the PDC banner alone in 1970.

When Frei took office in 1964 he had promised that his administration would not follow the Chilean tradition wherein parties are "elected by the left to rule with the right." He eschewed all alliances and depended on a series of ad hoc arrangements for enactment of his legislative program. This policy was responsible for some of Frei's problems, because the other parties adopted an irresponsible obstructionist attitude to many of his proposals. The idea of operating independently of alliances with other parties is opposed by some segments of the PDC, however, and helps explain the bitterness aroused by the rebels' desire to work closely with the Marxist left.

At the junta meeting, Frei's supporters were organized to an unusual extent and managed barely to win a victory on the proposal to run alone in 1970 by a vote of 233 to 215. As a result, several leftist senators and deputies, as well as leaders of the Christian Democratic Youth group, resigned from the party. They have organized a movement, which they claim is not a political party, and plan to cooperate with the Marxist

left in a "popular unity" campaign in 1970. They may hope that the Communists and Socialists in 1970 will support a candidate from their group who has left the PDC. Although the resignations are small in terms of actual numbers, some of the most dynamic members have left the party, making it more difficult for the PDC to select a candidate who will appeal to a wide spectrum of voters.

There is at present no prospective Christian Democratic presidential candidate who is the overwhelming choice of the party. Radomiro Tomic, former ambassador to the US, has for years been considered Frei's heir apparent. He remains the one PDC candidate who could unite its factions and galvanize its waning strength. Last spring he stated that he would not run without the support of the Marxist left, which has since rebuffed him. He has indicated more recently, however, that as a "disciplined PDC militant" he would accept the party's nomination if it were offered. Even if Tomic could unite the PDC behind his candidacy, the party would still need the cooperation of another major party to have any



Radomiro Tomic

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chance of winning the presidential election in 1970.

Of several candidates who have emerged from the "officialist" wing of the party, the most important is the former minister of interior, Bernardo Leighton. Leighton, who in March was elected to the Chamber of Deputies, is probably Frei's first choice. Although Leighton would have some appeal to the right, he is beginning to make statements that could appeal to the left. In one such statement he said he favored some reintegration of Cuba into the inter-American system. Other possibilities are former defense minister Juan de Dios Carmona and former housing minister Juan Hamilton. Both were elected to the Senate in March, and both at this stage must be considered dark horses.

Another government official promoting his own candidacy is Foreign Minister Gabriel Valdes. Early in the Frei administration Valdes was a strong proponent of making Chile a force in the "third world" of developing nations. Although Chile has not renewed diplomatic relations with



Gabriel Valdes

Cuba, Valdes has often stated his desire to see Cuba reintegrated into the inter-American system. He clearly fancies himself the grand diplomat who could achieve this goal. He makes no secret of his preference for Europe over the United States and has tried to weaken US influence in inter-American affairs.

The PDC's choice of a candidate, which probably will be known by the end of the summer, will give a strong indication of how the PDC intends to pitch its campaign. The party may conclude that the conservatives from whom it drew much of its support in 1964 will no longer be willing to back its social and economic reforms, and that its candidate may be forced to rely on drawing votes from the left in order to perpetuate the PDC in power.

THE LEFTIST PARTIES

The most important leftist parties in Chile are the Communist Party (PCCh) and the Socialist Party (PS). There are several small extremist groups, but none has any widespread following. A breakaway faction of the Socialist Party was all but eliminated from the political scene in the March elections, retaining one hold-over senator and electing another.

The Communist Party of Chile has been legal since the 1930s except for a ten-year period from 1948 to 1958. It works within the parameters of Chilean democracy and opposes large-scale violence as a means to political power. The PCCh is one of Moscow's strongest supporters within the international Communist movement and has been active in organizational work for international meetings of Communist parties.

The PCCh can count on strong discipline on the part of its members and therefore is a valuable ally to other parties in electoral compensation agreements. In the congressional elections of

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March 1969 the PCCh polled 15.7 percent of the vote. It now holds six seats in the Senate and 22 seats in the Chamber of Deputies.

In the past two presidential elections, the PCCh has formally supported pro-Castro Socialist Salvador Allende as the candidate of the Popular Action Front (FRAP), in which the PCCh is aligned with the Socialists. The party would probably support Allende again if he were nominated by the Socialists. There is some evidence, however, that the Communists would prefer a broader grouping, possibly behind a Radical candidate or a breakaway Christian Democrat. PCCh Secretary General Luis Corvalan has said that if the left cannot agree on an acceptable candidate the Communists might run their own man simply to put in an appearance. Such a move would lose the support of voters who cannot bring themselves to vote for a Communist but who have no hesitation



Salvador Allende

about voting for a candidate from another party who is supported by the Communists.

The Communist position in the presidential election will be determined in large part by the nominee selected by the Socialist Party (PS). The PS is in general more extremist than the PCCh, and PS leaders often travel to Cuba for visits with Castro. Allende himself recently visited Peking, Hanoi, Pyongyang, and Moscow. Despite the loss of some support due to the split-off of one faction, the Socialists received 12.2 percent of the vote last March and now hold four seats in the Senate and 15 in the Chamber of Deputies.

Salvador Allende retains a strong chance of being renominated by the Socialists. His respectable background would appeal to traditional elements of the population as well as to the Marxist parties' usual constituency. The party is confronted, however, with deciding whether to support the Communist call for "unity of the left" by pushing a non-Socialist candidate, or to maintain its "ideological purity" and run its own candidate. There are at least two factions within the PS besides Allende's supporters, and Allende has alienated some Socialists because of his recent two-month absence from Chile.

Some of Allende's opponents within the party favor the violence that has increased in recent weeks. Police have discovered a "guerrilla training school" in the Santiago area and an arms cache farther south. Bombs, weapons, and maps of military bases and other strategic locations were found at both sites.



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The MIR has been implicated in violence in Santiago and in Concepcion before, and in general eschews political

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action, preferring armed struggle. There is some reason to believe that the MIR and the PS may be linked, with the MIR acting as the paramilitary apparatus.

The security forces, although capable of handling most violence, are becoming apprehensive about the increase in violence in Chile. The carabineros in particular act as the first line of defense against street riots and other manifestations. Should there be any prolonged rioting, the army might have to be called in to assist them.

OTHER POLITICAL PARTIES

Much of the vote for the National Party (PN) in the March elections resulted from public identification between the PN and former president Jorge Alessandri. Alessandri is a 73-year old independent who has avoided being tied to the partisan affairs of the PN. The PN has capitalized, however, on his relative conservatism, and most PN candidates tried to use his name in their campaigns.

Alessandri is almost certain to run next year. He would appeal not only to conservatives, but also to portions of the middle and lower classes that are disillusioned with President Frei. Many political observers believe that if the presidential election were held today, Alessandri would be the victor.

The National Party itself has relatively little political strength. It is doubtful that the party will grow unless it manages to revamp its image and loosens its ideological ties with the propertied classes. It is in the mainstream of Latin American nationalism and therefore is not averse to actions that may be against US interests.

The Radical Party (PR), a traditional, opportunistic middle-class party, may hold the key to the political picture for 1970. For several years

the PR machinery has been under the control of a left-wing group that has cooperated with the Communists and the Socialists in Congress and in congressional by-elections. This policy has alienated some of the traditional support of the party, however, and in March the PR dropped to fourth place. It received 12.9 percent of the vote and now holds nine seats in the Senate and 24 seats in the Chamber of Deputies.

The Radical Party leadership wants FRAP to agree to throw Marxist support to a leftist Radical candidate. Such a candidate probably could hold much of the PR behind him and would run a strong campaign in a three-way race against, for example, a Christian Democrat and the independent, Alessandri. The Communists have indicated a willingness to participate in such an arrangement, as they did in the 1930s and 1940s during the period of Chile's Popular Front. A leftist unity candidate would draw support away from the Christian Democratic candidate.

The Socialists, however, condemn the PR as a "bourgeois" party and are reluctant even to support Radical congressional candidates. Because the Communists do not want to destroy FRAP completely, Socialist intransigence could provide an insuperable obstacle to a broad-based leftist alliance. Even if the Radical leadership should decide to support a Socialist, much of the rest of the party probably would vote for another candidate.

If the Radicals do not get Marxist support for their candidate in 1970, the campaign will not present the relatively clear-cut, left-center-right choice that a leftist Radical, a PDC man, and Alessandri would provide. Whether the Radicals would draw votes primarily from the left or the right depends in large part on the identity of the candidate.

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OUTLOOK

Political maneuvering is certain to increase as the parties get down to the serious business of choosing their nominees and drafting their political programs. In Chile politics is never forgotten for long, and a presidential election such as the one coming up is sure to arouse the passions of the electorate.

The Christian Democratic Party, after its stunning victories in 1964 and 1965, is threatened with becoming merely another Chilean party, rather than a new wave of hope showing the way for the rest of Latin America. Unless Frei can

soon restore some of the lost glamour, his party is likely to have a difficult time retaining the presidency.

The keys to the race remain Alessandri's health and the unity (or disunity) of the leftist parties. Although Alessandri seems to be in good shape, his age makes his condition naturally uncertain. The leftist parties will be under strong compulsion to work together because by so doing they could well capture the presidency. It is not unlikely, however, that existing animosities, personal and ideological, will prevent such co-operation.

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